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1-1-2007

# William Freeman Myrick Goss Library of the History of Engineering

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Morris, Sammie L., "William Freeman Myrick Goss Library of the History of Engineering" (2007). *Libraries Research Publications*.  
Paper 84.

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**Purdue University**  
**Archives and Special Collections Library**  
**William Freeman Myrick Goss Library of the History of Engineering**

“Learning to look backward with reverence and to benefit from the successes and failures of the past should enable the engineer to build better today and tomorrow.” --A.A. Potter, *Dean of Engineering, Purdue University, 1947*

In 1928 Purdue University received the personal library of former Dean of Engineering William F.M. Goss. The Goss Library, comprised of approximately nine hundred volumes, related primarily to the history of engineering, with particular emphasis placed on Goss’s research on locomotives and the railroads. Soon, the library received an addition of approximately two hundred volumes from the collection of former Purdue Professor Michael J. Golden. With the combined libraries of these two former colleagues and friends, the University began to focus on building a major resource on the history of engineering.

In 1930, Mrs. William F.M. Goss established an endowment for the Goss Library that ensured its permanence and provided ongoing funds for purchases over time. The Goss Library has also benefited from substantial contributions of books from Purdue alumni, engineers, and friends of the University. By the late 1940s, the collection had grown to 3,500 volumes.

Reflecting the land grant nature of Purdue University, the Goss Library’s strengths lie in documenting the history of science, engineering, and technology. From the beginning, emphasis was placed on acquiring items that students and faculty would use to complement the University’s curricular interests. The purpose of the Goss Library remains much the same today—to promote a broader interest in the progressive engineering sciences by preserving their early history and present development. The history of transportation is well documented in the collection, particularly the history of railroads, but also canal navigation, hot air balloons, and aviation. Electrical engineering, hydraulics, bridges, metallurgy, mathematics, chemistry, physics, and scientific inventions represent additional subject strengths in the Goss Library.

Items from the collection were featured in the 2004 Purdue exhibition, “Voices That Changed the World.” University of Arizona chemistry professor, Wayne E. Wesolowski, has used the Goss Library for various publications over the years, including several videos for PBS on model railroading. Professor John H. Lienhard has also published using the Goss Collection; his *Engines of Our Ingenuity* offers an engineer’s perspective on technology and culture. Graduate level English courses at Purdue have studied volumes in the collection, working to translate 16<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century texts in Spanish, Latin, and English, and striving to clarify the relationships between engineering and the liberal arts.

The Goss Library is fully cataloged and can be searched within the Purdue University Libraries online catalog: <http://www.lib.purdue.edu/>. The collection has been featured in newsletters and brochures, and will be included in an upcoming series of note cards highlighting treasures of the Purdue University Libraries. Select highlights of the Goss Library include: Copernicus’ *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* (1617); Newton’s *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia*

*Mathematica* (1714); Descartes' *Geometria* (1659-1661); Euclid's *Opera* [*Megarensis*] (1509); Agricola's *De Re Metallica* (1556); Hero of Alexandria's *Spirituali di Herone Alessandrino* (1592); and Agostino Ramelli's *Le Diverse et Artificiose Machine del Capitano Agostino Ramelli...* (1588).

## **Purdue University**

### **Special Collections Overview**

The diverse Special Collections of Purdue University Libraries offer a treasure trove of primary source materials for faculty, students, and researchers. Holdings include rare books, manuscript collections, and University archives. Major subject strengths include the history of science, engineering, and technology; the history of economic thought; the birth of aeronautics and astronautics; time and motion studies; typography and book design. Particular highlights of the manuscript collections include the George Palmer Putnam Collection of Amelia Earhart Papers, the world's largest collection of Earhart papers and memorabilia; the papers of Nobel Prize winning chemist Herbert C. Brown; the papers of Frank B. and Lillian M. Gilbreth, inventors of motion study whose lives were chronicled in *Cheaper by the Dozen*; over 1,000 original cartoon drawings by "Dean of American Cartoonists" John T. McCutcheon; and the papers of playwright and humorist George Ade and author Charles Major.

Significant rare book collections include the Goss Library of the History of Engineering; the Krannert Special Collection, pertaining to business, economics, and politics; the M.G. Mellon Library on the history of chemistry; the Bruce Rogers Collection; the Bitting Collections on glass and world fairs and expositions; the Indiana Collection, including early and rare works printed in Indiana or written by Indiana authors; and a large collection of finely bound books published by the Limited Editions Club of New York.